gender, sex, & sexuality - what’s the difference?

- **sex**: a biological category determined by a combination of chromosomes, hormones, secondary sex characteristics, & internal/external sex organs
- **gender identity**: an individual’s emotional and psychological sense of gender
- **gender expression**: the way in which someone presents their gender and is perceived by society
- **sexual orientation**: level & type of attraction to others

Note: These categories are distinct from one another & are not necessarily deterministic (i.e., an individual assigned a male sex may not necessarily identify as a man or have a masculine gender expression)

how do I talk about gender, sex, & sexuality categories?

- **sex**: sex categories are usually designated as **male & female**; an individual’s sex can also fall outside these categories based on a difference of sex development (DSD) or intersex condition
- **gender identity**: gender identity categories are commonly just called gender categories, and are most appropriately described with words such as **man/men & woman/women**; some individuals may identify with another gender category, such as being **transgender** or **genderqueer**
- **gender expression**: the ways that individuals express their gender are usually referred to using words like **masculine, feminine, androgynous, & gender non-conforming**
- **sexual orientation**: there are a multitude of categories that individuals may use to identify their sexual orientation; examples may include **lesbian, gay, bisexual, heterosexual, asexual, & many others**

some helpful terms

- **LGBTQ+**: a term that refers to a broad spectrum of gender identities and sexual orientations, including those who are **lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual, & pansexual**; self-identification and self-definition are paramount when discussing these identities, as preferred terms may vary depending on the individual
- **cisgender**: describes someone whose gender identity aligns with societal expectations based on their assigned sex at birth (i.e., an individual assigned a female sex who identifies as a woman)
- **transgender**: a general term to describe a group of people whose gender identity differs from societal expectations based on their assigned sex at birth; examples may include:
  - **transgender man** (an individual assigned a female sex who identifies as a man)
  - **transgender woman** (an individual assigned a male sex who identifies as a woman)
  - **genderqueer** or **gender non-conforming** (an individual who does not identify as a man or as a woman)

why are these distinctions important for my classroom?

Whether you are teaching a course for future psychologists, teachers, administrators, or otherwise, gender & sex categories often show up in unexpected ways. It’s important to be mindful of these topics regardless of your discipline for several reasons:

- **commitment to inclusion**: Lehigh University is committed to the inclusion of and respect for all individuals regardless of sexuality, gender identity, and/or gender expression; as a member of this community, you have a responsibility to uphold that commitment
- **maximizing student learning**: students learn best when their environment is free of barriers; by using inclusive language and respectful practices, you are creating an environment where learning can occur more effectively for everyone
- **content clarity & precision**: for disciplines that discuss psychological or sociological trends & ata, it is especially critical that the concepts of gender, sex, & sexuality are discussed with clarity & precision to avoid confusion & to maximize understanding
tips for creating an inclusive classroom environment

➔ set a tone of respect on the very first day of class
➔ assume that you have LGBTQ+-identified students in your classroom, and work to create an inclusive environment for them
➔ don’t assume that a student identifies as a man or woman based on their appearance, or that your students identify as straight; it’s especially important to guard against language that makes assumptions (“this man said ____,” “she just told us that ____,” “if she was married, her husband would ____,” etc)
➔ take attendance / call role only after you have given students a chance to state what they prefer to be called, and allow students to self-identify their name & pronouns before the first day of your course
  ◆ a note on pronouns: individuals may go by she/her/hers, he/him/his, gender-neutral pronouns such as they/them/their, or an additional set of pronouns; if you are unsure of someone’s pronouns, ask
➔ avoid gendered groupings (“men on this side, women on this side”) as these may alienate transgender & gender non-conforming students
➔ hold other students accountable if they use exclusive language or refer to another student using incorrect pronouns
➔ incorporate content from LGBTQ+ individuals in your discipline and highlight the contributions of LGBTQ+ people to your discipline
➔ admit when you’ve made a mistake, apologize, correct yourself, and move on

adapted from Some Very Basic Tips for Making Higher Education More Accessible to Trans Students and Rethinking How We Talk about Gendered Bodies by Dean Spade (Radical Teacher, Number 92, Winter 2011).

best practices for discussing gender & sex in the classroom

1. Keep your language precise & consistent to maximize understanding
2. Acknowledge gaps in research & areas where more information is needed
3. Distinguish between patterns that emerge based on sex (a biological category) versus gender (a social category), as well as patterns that are impacted by both of these things
4. Be honest about what you know & do not know; some patterns & trends may be ambiguous and may require further study in order to accurately determine their biological and/or psychosocial associations
5. Provide your students with resources where they can learn more about these topics (visit the Pride Center’s website for a comprehensive list)

additional opportunities through the Pride Center

➔ learn
  ◆ attend an LUally training or request one for your department (opportunities listed at go.lehigh.edu/LUally)
  ◆ invite an LGBTQ+-identified guest speaker into your classroom to lecture
  ◆ screen an LGBTQ+-themed film in your classroom
➔ engage
  ◆ be present at LGBTQ+-related events on campus (find out about these from our newsletter at go.lehigh.edu/pridenews)
  ◆ co-advice one of the Pride Center’s affiliated groups
  ◆ join the Faculty & Staff Pride Network or Pride Faculty Council
➔ act
  ◆ prominently display inclusive images / “ally” symbols in your office
  ◆ don’t tolerate exclusive language from students or other faculty members
  ◆ refer students to the Pride Center as needed